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And We Weren't There

by Nat Bodian (Publishing Consultant)



Revealing 'Secrets': The Story Behind A Book Industry Marketing Classic

The latest royalty statement from R.R. Bowker indicates that *Book Marketing Handbook* and its companion Volume 2 have passed 6,000 copies in sales and are unrivaled as the established basic reference on book marketing worldwide.

Why the continuing success of this book marketing guide? Basically, I think, it's the idea that it spells out, in simple, easy-to-understand words, hundreds of techniques and approaches to specialized-book marketing — something that had never before been done in print prior to the appearance of this Bowker publication in 1980. In the paragraphs following, I will explain how it happened.

One of the early lessons I learned when I entered book marketing in the late 1950's, was that I was in a 'secret' profession. Every book marketer I'd encountered had his or her own secrets, learned the hard way on the job, and carried as a bag of preciously guarded tools, from one job to another.

Very early in my career, prior to entering book publishing, I'd been a journalist. I'd been trained in the tradition that a good reporter had to accumulate the facts and report them honestly, clearly, and accurately to his public.

That feeling was part of my being when I became a book marketer in 1959. But, after 20 years in the book industry, I sensed that book marketers, unlike news reporters, kept the knowledge they'd acquired pretty much to themselves and some had actually referred to their knowledge as their "secrets."

My reporter's instincts told me that what I'd learned were not "secrets" but techniques and as such should be shared. In January 1979, I started writing *Book Marketing Handbook*, working evenings and weekends in an office converted from a coal bin in the basement of my Hillside NJ home.

During the day at John Wiley & Son, where I worked as a marketing manager in the Sci-Tech division, I spoke to no one about my writing effort. I almost feared being found out.

The manuscript nearly complete after six months, I felt good about my progress, but harbored a secret fear that my job would be terminated if Wiley learned I'd told all my 'secrets' thinking that perhaps my superiors at Wiley may have considered them their secrets as well.

So, in the interest of protecting my Wiley job, I submitted the manuscript first to Wiley for publishing consideration. Through Stephen Kippur, an editor in the business books division, I submitted by proposal. Kippur immediately cleared it with his divisional publisher who in turn kicked the proposal 'upstairs' to Mike Harris, Wiley's head of the professional and reference books division.

I recall the day the proposal was left on Harris's desk. It stayed there, and I didn't get fired. But the proposal was never moved. It just lay there.

Periodically, over the next few months, I found occasions to talk with Harris on business matters. He never once mentioned my manuscript which I could see untouched on his desk.

I eventually came to realize that my work did not threaten my job; also that Wiley had no intention of publishing it. Finally, I told my sponsoring editor that I'd wait two more weeks; then I'd offer the book elsewhere. The same day I sent the manuscript to Bowker for their consideration. I mentioned in my proposal that Wiley was considering it as well and that if they liked it and made a publishing offer, I couldn't accept it for at least two weeks.

Bowker called back in several days saying they'd like to publish it. After two weeks, I called Bowker and said, "The book is yours if you still want it." They told me they did and I verbally agreed on the phone.

I then submitted a note to Stephen Kippur telling him that two weeks having passed, I'd just accepted a publishing offer from R.R. Bowker. Minutes later, Mike Harris walked up to me, right hand outstretched, "I hear Bowker is publishing your book . . . Congratulations!"

The book I'd started in secret and that I feared might cost me my job was now going to be published and I was still employed at Wiley.

But the hurt of Mike Harris's long silence over months was still with me some nine months later when the book reached publication. The then president of R.R. Bowker contacted Andy Neilly, then president of Wiley and suggested a joint inter-company celebration on the publication of *Book Marketing Handbook*.

I said "No." I made it clear that *Book Marketing Handbook* was a personal effort, done at home on my own time, and that it had nothing to do with my job. The celebration never took place.

In the ensuing years, Andy Neilly showed great pride in my having written *Book Marketing Handbook* while in his employ. He had been for many years chairman of the AAP committee on publishing education and my effort had gone a long way in advancing the marketing aspect of that activity.

In 1979, when I signed the publishing contract at Bowker, I was asked what I considered the effective life of *Book Marketing Handbook*. I told them four years. Three years later when I approached Bowker to do a second edition, I was talked into doing a second, all-new volume instead. It was published in 1983.

In 1992, both volumes were still active sellers on Bowker's list and collectively had sold over 6,000 copies and were in use as references in publishing establishments in every corner of the world.

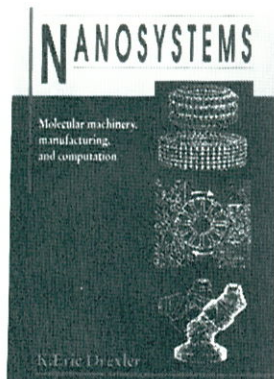
How did becoming an author in 1980 affect my life after 20 years spent marketing the books of other authors? Well, for one thing it taught me that the anonymity I was able to enjoy as a news writer I would not be able to enjoy as a book author.

Being author of *Book Marketing Handbook* thrust me into situations I never would have imagined — including numerous university and seminar lectures and speaking appearances from

continued on page 50

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And We Weren't There *continued from page 19*

coast to coast, a faculty spot at the NYU summer publishing institute, serving as keynote speaker at a national publishing conference, and domestic and overseas

publishing consultations.

I guess two of the most satisfying experiences for this 'anonymous' writer were placement of *Book Marketing Handbook* in the permanent public reference collection of the Library of Congress and a nomination to The Publishing Hall of Fame. ☺

Meyer's Connection *continued from page 33*

Eventually, all the pieces I have described and "costed out" will come together into a larger picture called the economics of journal publishing.

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

37	Alper	21	Faxon
7	Ambassador	2	Jaeger
12	ATG	30	Majors
35	Baker & Taylor	52	Midwest
41	Ballen	45	Oliver's Books
46	Blackwell North America	48	Parmer Books
18	CARL Systems, Inc.	43	Pergamon
5	Cambridge Scientific	16	Readmore
8	Collets	38	Springer-Verlag
14	Coutts	29	VCH
9	EBSCO	50	Wiley/Research Books
26	Elsevier		

NOTE: For those publishers reading this column, JoAnn says that it is important to realize that if your journal subscription is not reaching its destination because of faulty addressing or other reasons then all your mail to that subscriber is delayed, from renewals to meeting notices to promotional brochures. It makes a very simple, yet strong case, for JoAnn's constant reminder to "keep those mailing lists clean and in proper address order."

FINAL NOTE: A very large thank you to JoAnn Malpass for all her time and effort in getting such a grand amount of information to me for this article along with very best wishes as she begins a well-earned retirement this year. The industry will miss you, greatly, JoAnn, for there will be a large hole that no one will fill easily or quickly. ☺